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Jennifer and Rachel: A Summary

Lee M. Silver is an expert on the social repercussions of reproductive technology, he even wrote a book (Remaking Eden: Cloning and Beyond in a Brave New World) on the subject. One section of this book, titled “Jennifer and Rachel” addresses the future of reproductive cloning with the hypothetical situation of Jennifer. In the hypothetical, Jennifer is 35 years old, she has a stable, well-paying career and no current romantic relationship. One day she wakes and, realizing that she’s not getting any younger, decides she’d like to be a mother. Not wanting to worry about the possible variables that come with donated sperm, Jennifer decides that since she’s healthy there’s no need to take a chance with her child’s genes. In this fictional timeline, reproductive cloning is just another aspect of society, if illegal in the US [with a few exceptions]. Jennifer has the means to support a child, and her desire for one is great enough that she is willing to subvert the government to acquire a clone. The hypothetical is used as the example upon which Silver builds his arguments. With the ‘Jennifer and Rachel’ scenario firmly in place, Silver opens the door and begins systematically debunking arguments against cloning.

First Silver address the question of harm. Jennifer is unharmed, but what of Rachel? Silver anticipates the arguments of Dr. Daniel Callahan, who might claim that [Rachel] knowing her genetic future is harmful. Silver, using his own balding grandfather as an example, counters that most people have some idea of what they’ll face later on in life. Silver continues by saying that it is unlikely such knowledge would be any more traumatic for Rachel than another child.

But perhaps Rachel could be harmed by the expectations placed upon her by Jennifer. Silver points out that there is no guarantee that Jennifer’s expectations of her daughter will be anymore unrealistic than that of an average parent. He counters that Rachel’s upbringing and environment will differ greatly from Jennifer’s, making them separate people regardless of having identical genes.

Dr. Callahan argues that Rachel’s rights to a unique genetic code are being violated. Silver states that there has never been such a right. Twins occur naturally all the time, after all. Silver continues the argument by claiming that there *will* be some Rachel’s who feel bad upon learning that they have an elder twin. Silver is of the opinion that it’s hardly enough reason to ban reproductive cloning all together. Silver points out that poverty hasn’t yet been banned, and surely a child born poor is worse off than any Rachel.

Silver acknowledges the various religious stances against cloning, but admits that theological arguments can’t be rebuffed by the scientific. Silver also looks at the opposite side of the coin where people [like the *New York Times* columnist William Safire] are concerned for the effect of reproductive cloning on human evolution. Silver -a professor at Princeton University working in the departments of Molecular Biology, Ecology, and Evolutionary Biology- dismisses Safire’s worries. Silver says, in practice, reproductive cloning would only be available to the very wealthy, and even then most people want a child of their *own*. The clones would be identical to their parents, and thus still different from the rest of the world. Even so, clones would end up being a very small percentage of the population.

Silver then turns the discussion towards the idea of parenthood. He begins by explaining that, before cloning came around people could avoid becoming parents by not having sex. But when a child can be created from a single cell, then it’s suddenly easy to become a genetic donor. Silver presents a second hypothetical that highlights the potential abuse of reproductive cloning.

In Silver’s second hypothetical, Michel Jordan goes to the doctor’s office and has blood drawn. One of the lab technicians steals a portion of that blood and takes it too an IVF clinic where it can then be used to create Jordan clones. These Jordan clones would be expensive, but maybe a few prospective parents would buy in the hopes of having a famous child.

Silver, using this ‘Michel Jordan hypothetical’, argues that even if cells were taken from an unaware donor there is no practical way to *use* that child, even in the case of the donor being a celebrity. The parents would put copious amounts of time, energy, and money to raise a child that *can’t* be the same as the original. The argument is a repeat of Jennifer and Rachel’s situation, as identical genetics doesn’t account for the difference in up-bringing.

Regardless of the dubious uses of reproductive cloning, Silver acknowledges that there will always be those who will attempt to abuse it. Even so, Silver claims that reproductive cloning is inevitable because as it *will* be possible with technology advancing as it is, there will be those who desire to have a cloned child.

Silver then states that cloning will not be controlled by either the morality of society or governmental laws, but by the market. As evidenced in the Jennifer and Rachel hypothetical, the people who desire reproductive cloning don’t care about the laws, and so long as they’re willing to pay, there will be someone willing to sell.

Silver doesn’t need a hypothetical situation to support this claim, for within two weeks of Dolly’s [the first cloned sheep] grand introduction to the world a company named ‘Clonaid’ set up shop in the Bahamas. Run by the French scientist Dr. Brigitte Boisselier, the company announced its intention to open a clinic that offered reproductive cloning [for a fee], directing the advertisement towards infertile and homosexual couples.

Works Cited

Silver, Lee M. “Jennifer and Rachel.” *Remaking Eden: Cloning and Beyond in a Brave New World* (1988): 117-25. Rpt. Iin *Writing in the Disciplines: A Reader and Rhetoric for Academic Writers,* 6th ed. Ed. Mary Lynch Kennedy and William J. Kennedy. Boston: Pearson 2009. 340-46. Print.